Radical Grace and the Economy

Overview

This is an overview of a Workbook on how mainstream economics makes fundamental value judgments which violate key spiritual values.

It contains nine *Modules* discussing how the foundations of economics rest on assertions which are not amenable to people of the spirit.

And it discusses how applying deeper values — drawn from the insights of Franciscan and Indigenous economics — can move us toward an economy of spirit.

This is a PDF file. It can be downloaded in the usual manner, using File|Save or ⎙|Save.

If you've already seen the *Overview*, you can skip straight to the Module that interests you below. Otherwise, keep scrolling.

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Overview of the Nine Discussion Modules

I. Denial of Grace

Conventional economics has no concept of grace.
It knows only fair trade — give as much as you get.

This is entirely transactional in nature. Fair trade is its highest aspiration, which offers nothing without taking something else back.

An economy of the spirit lives by grace.

Don't give as much as you get.
Just give. Period. For the sake of giving.

In an environment of generosity, when all are in giving mode, everyone's needs would be met through basic caring and gratuitous spirit.

Is that a pipe dream?

II. Denial of Vocation

Conventional economics draws our aspirations away from vocation and service, in favour of empty consumption.

In this view, service is just work, endured only to obtain consumption.

In an economy of the spirit the vocation of service is a sacred endeavour.

Yet we have to consume to meet basic needs.

But your vocation may call you to limit your consumption to give you what you need in pursuit of a higher purpose.

Is that too demanding?

III. Denial of Abundance

Conventional economics asserts that the central fact of life is scarcity. There's not enough to meet all our insatiable wants.

So we need the magic of the market to ration it out for us.

An economy of the spirit disputes that:

Unlimited wants are not a good thing.
Unlimited consumption is not a good thing.

And nature's abundance is more than enough to meet our finite needs.

Needs come before wants.

IV. Denial of Community

Conventional economics is intensely individualist. It claims that all desires arise from deep inside each separate mind.

Its market model imagines we can put fragmented individuals together in a utopia of individual transactions in perfect harmony.

An economy of the spirit recognizes that we're steeped in community from the very start.

We are shaped by our community down to the very language we speak.

We need to balance the needs of our sacred community with the needs of individual self-expression.

Have we lost our balance?

V. Denial of the Individual

Conventional economics denies true individuality. Its paradigm offers only a meaningless drive for satisfaction.

It leaves the individual an empty shell.
An individual with no content is nothing.

An economy of spirit will give individuals the means to express their true selves.

Which can be found only in their mission in partnership with the Creator.

At the same time, we all have a little of the empty false self within us, so the challenge is real.

Who is your true self?

VI. Denial of the Humble

Conventional economics glorifies and empowers those who are overly-entitled and those who are well-endowed with material possessions.

It claims that the poor are the authors of their own demise by failing to utilize the resources of the free market to improve their lot.

An economy of grace recognizes that many of the marginalized and the broken are those who do not possess the grasping and aggressive nature often needed to thrive in the market arena.

We should give priority to ensuring that those at the bottom receive the resources they need to discern their calling and pursue their mission in life.

Let the well-endowed stand in line for a change.

Will *you* flip society upside-down?

VII. Denial of Justice

Conventional economics claims that justice is not a matter of concern because a truly competitive market automatically balances everything, ensuring that everyone gets what they deserve.

In this view, social justice is a collateral benefit of individual market choices. If injustices arise out of market imperfections, we just need to make the market more perfect and it will fix itself.

An economy of grace recognizes that there's no such automatic fix. Justice Is a community project.

It is found where people accommodate each other's needs in loving interdependence, and where a sensitivity to each other's well-being inspires them to ensure that nobody is denied the resources to live in dignity.

But can we just jettison the market?

VIII. Denial of Mother Earth

Conventional economics considers the planet to be no more than a pile of resources waiting to be exploited by humans, as if we stood outside of it.

Could we do it sustainably? We'd still be stripping the planet of its resources without reciprocity. And the growth imperative will stand in the way.

An economy of grace recognizes that the land is family.

We are commissioned by God to care for Mother Earth, build a relationship of mutual nurturing.

And to honour all our relations who live in the land, sea or sky in full respect for all forms of life.

Do we know how to nurture creation?

IX. Denial of Entitlement

Everyone is entitled to a place to call home, a community to call family, a role in which to live one's calling with dignity, the means to rise to life's challenges, and a path to the spirit which gives us life.

But in the market culture of recent centuries, only commodities matter and power rules. Everything is up for grabs. Every sacred entitlement can be stolen and colonized by the forces of money or might.

People of grace stand opposed to colonization at all its forms historical and modern.

These include appropriating the land of nature's children, cancelling communities and cultures, imposing roles and identities, and corrupting the spirit.

It's not just the land grab.

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This Workbook critiques *Mainstream Economics*. While that covers a wide range of issues and perspectives, it's rooted in a core model of how the economy works.

What is Mainstream Economics?

Mainstream Economics is an imaginary scale model of an economy where individuals pursue their narrow self-interests in an environment of free market competition.

Believers of this idealistic model claim that it results in *perfect justice* and *perfect consumer satisfaction* — as long as government interferes with it as little as possible.

Instances are acknowledged where the market doesn't do this job well — but these are just imperfections in the market that can be fixed up with better markets and properly limited government.

There are "*heterodox*" economists who question the core model, claiming it's too narrow in its perfect competition and in its hard core individualism:

- Holding goods in common is just as rational and efficient as trading them.
- Humanity has evolved to be social animals not isolated individuals.
- Utilitarianism is a philosophical dinosaur.
- Competition is often more predatory than benevolent.

While considering all those critiques important – *here we critique the model in other terms*, namely …

Morality Generosity Calling Inclusion

Many dismiss these criteria as being beyond the bounds of economics. Yet they shape its very core.

Hence we focus on the narrowest of the models — not only because there we can pinpoint these moral failings — but also because so many policy regimes around the world follow the mainstream model.

We have the beginnings of a podcast — discussing the workbook and some of it's issues — up on a Youtube channel. Have a look here.

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